

Using Technology in the Elementary Classroom

By Marilyn Western

5 Favorite Online Projects You Can Start This Fall!

This summer, take a rainy afternoon to explore some of the best-ever online collaborative projects that allow your students to step outside of your classroom. I have some favorites picked out for you, but make sure you explore each site completely for even more good activities that are motivating curriculum -supporters.

Before you commit to a project consider the following:

- Start by joining a simple project – something that takes a minimum amount of time (for example, collect one set of data and email to the project host) and supports your curriculum. See how it goes, learn from your experience, and then try something a little more involved.
- This project will be a learning experience for your students AND for you. You don't have to know everything before you start. Try to figure things out for yourself (ask students to help – you'll be amazed at what they can come up with!) If you get really confounded, ask for help. The project coordinator is there to make this adventure work.
- Don't give up. Other classes are depending on you. Finish the project to the best of your abilities, and then evaluate to decide what characteristics or activities to look for in your next project (What gave you problems with this project? Was it too time-intensive, involve too many new skills or tech tools you weren't familiar with or have access to, etc).

Here are five of my all-time favorite collections of online projects. Each has been around for a number of years, which means the coordinators have smoothed out the bumps. Choose ONE to try this Fall and enjoy!

JenuineTECH (formerly TechnoSpud) <http://www.jenuinetech.com>

Wonderful standards-based projects, often based on monthly holidays (e.g. *Pumpkin Seed Count*) or events (e.g. *Salute to Seuss*). Some past projects have had children predict and determine the most found vowel and consonant in a box of Alphabits, determine whether double-stuffed Oreo cookies really contained double the amount of cream filling as the regular Oreo cookie, and, after reading *Prince Caspian*, to select one of 17 reading response activities, such as character trading cards, a reader's theater podcast, or to create a Narnia Newsletter. Watch for new projects throughout the year.

My fav: OREO (Our Really Exciting Online)

Project PreK-6 students stack Oreo cookies as high as s/he can and then average all individual results to report the class average. This site offers instructions, standards, activities, recipes, worksheets, a sculpture gallery, and, of course, the results posted by grade level.



Journey North/South <http://www.learner.org/jnorth> K-12 students track the coming of fall in one of three ways: sunlight and the seasons, plants and the seasons, and seasonal migrations. In the *Mystery Class* project (Spring only), students try to find ten mystery classes somewhere in the world; clues include sunrise and sunset times, the location's history, geography, and culture. The *Tulip Garden* project encourages students to plant tulip bulbs in the Fall, they report when tulips emerge and bloom to map Spring's journey north. Students can also follow the migrations of animals (whooping creanes, bald eagles, hummingbirds, robins, and more.

My fav: Monarch Butterfly Migration Record your own observations of monarch butterflies as they migrate to Mexico! Learn how to watch for migrating monarchs, report your sightings, and watch how monarch habitat changes, keep a journal (site provides templates & teacher tips), watch migration maps. Site also provides slideshows, activities, background info and assessment suggestions. AND there is a *Symbolic Migration Project* in which US students send paper butterflies to Mexico in the Fall. Students there return the paper butterflies in the Spring.

Global School House Network <http://www.globalschoolnet.org>

The *Projects Registry* is a Internet's oldest and largest clearinghouse for online projects put together by classroom teachers. *Online Expeditions* connects students with real-time, real world expeditions. *International Schools CyberFair* gives students a chance to post their research about local communities and to evaluate other projects.

My fav: GeoGame (Grades 3-6) Register and select a game from the web site. Students use maps, atlases, and other reference material to match the description of a location with a given city. When all cities are mated, enter the answers at the web site and submit. If you are correct, you will be able to print out a certificate to post in your classroom. You can also guide students in researching information about your own community and enter the information on the GeoGame Questionnaire. When GeoGame has enough entries, they form them all into a new puzzle to be solved which will be posted for about one year.



CIESE <http://www.ciese.org/collabprojs.html> The Center for Innovation in Engineering and Science sponsors projects that link to Science and Math standards using real time data available from the Internet, and collaborative projects. Do check out *Projects using Primary Sources & Archived Collections*, and *Engineering Projects* (yes – scary title for elementary kids, but do check it out: *Whichever Way the Wind Blows*, *Ant Day Care Center*, and *Mini-Squares of Life* are all aimed at Grades 1-5).

My fav: Square of Life (Grades 1-5) Students plot square meters on the playground and record living and non-living things that are found there. After submitting your data, you can compare and contrast your information with data submitted by other classes to find How Are We Alike and Different? Great teacher guide that includes lesson plans, extension activities, curriculum standards, and student assessment suggestions.

CyberBee (Grades K-6) <http://www.cyberbee.com> More of a collection of lessons and web pages, this site has a wonderful collection of curriculum ideas, research tools, treasure hunts, how to's, web links and articles. The *Interactive Copyright Questions and Answers* is especially well done and worth a second look by elementary teachers and students.

My fav: Postcard Geography (Grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12) A class-to-class exchange in which your class commits to sending a post card – either 'snail mail' OR electronic - to every class on your selected



category list to teach others about your community. This project may take more work than appears at first glance and, if using snail mail, will run into some expense (postcards and stamps) but will be extremely motivating as cards are received from September through February 1. Last year's K-2 category had 135 schools to send postcards to and the Grades 3-5 category had 319 participants! The teacher blog is a great place to ask questions, share project expertise (some teachers participate every year) and ideas for getting the most out of this project

Of course, I can't stop at just five project collections. Give these a look:

Tooth Tally at <http://barwellroad.es.wcpss.net/toothtally/08tooth.html>

Flat Stanley at <http://www.flatstanley.com>

Monster Exchange at <http://www.monsterexchange.org>

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